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Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

GRAY DAVIS
Governor

MARY D. NICHOLS
Secretary for Resources

RUTH COLEMAN
Acting Director, California State Parks



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www.parks.ca.gov

Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park
c/o Año Nuevo State Reserve
New Years Creek Road
Pescadero, CA 94060
(650)879-2120

Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park



Like a siren perched where coast and ocean meet, the lighthouse at Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park calls to motorists along Highway 1. It's hard to miss the stately 115-foot structure, the tallest operating lighthouse on the West Coast. Pigeon Point Light Station is on the National Register of Historic Places—a reminder of the days when whalers and Gold Rush era clipper ships fought gales, stiff seas, jagged coastal rocks and unforgiving fog.

THE POINT'S COLORFUL PAST

Pigeon Point's original name, Whale Point, was inspired by the gray whales that migrate past the point. California's boom from gold rush to statehood brought many ships to these rugged waters. In June 1853 the Boston-based *Carrier Pigeon*, on her maiden voyage, was torn apart by a fog-blanketed rock off Whale Point. Thereafter, it was called Pigeon Point.

A series of wrecks off the point indicated the need for a lighthouse. On November 15, 1872, the station's fog signal began sounding a distinctive bellow that guided mariners for more than a century. The lighthouse was outfitted with the most powerful lens of the day—a first-order Fresnel lens. Perched in a glass-enclosed room at the top of the lighthouse, the lens stands 16 feet tall and weighs four tons. Its designer, French physicist Augustine Jean Fresnel, used 1,008 handcrafted, brass-framed prisms to concentrate the source of light, thereby maximizing light efficiency.

The prisms, stacked vertically to form two dozen nine-and-a-half-foot tall panels, were joined together to form a six-foot-diameter circular frame with the light source in the middle. A clockwork mechanism rotated the panels, producing a light flash precisely every ten seconds. The lighthouse's signature beam continues today, flashing light from a 1,000-watt light bulb every ten seconds. The fog signal was replaced by modern aids to navigation in 1976, although it is sometimes sounded on special occasions.

The lighthouse sits on an eight-foot foundation. Its walls, four-and-a-half feet thick at the base and tapering to two feet at the top, employ structurally connected inner and outer walls strong enough to emerge undamaged from the 1906 San Francisco and 1989 Loma Prieta earthquakes.

NATURAL HISTORY

History may be the park's top billing, but the point's natural beauty is also a major attraction. Its high perch provides scenic views of harbor and elephant seals and whales. During spring and winter migrations, the whales travel relatively close to the lighthouse grounds, particularly in the shallow waters of the cove south of the point. Standing on the station's overlook boardwalk, visitors can observe northward-bound California gray whale cows and their new calves taking advantage of the safety of the cove. Farther out the spouts of humpback and blue whales can often be seen.

Some 50 species of migratory and native birds live here, including marbled murrelets, an endangered species that nests in nearby old growth forests and feeds in coastal waters. Tidepools are a short walk north of Pigeon Point. Below the point, frothy waves washing over rock ledges cause sea palms to sway.



Gull



WHERE, WHEN AND WEATHER

Pigeon Point Light Station is approximately midway between Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz, near the village of Pescadero. The grounds are open daily from 8:00 a.m. to sunset, except for rainy days, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Days. Tours are offered from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Friday through Sunday. Self-guided tour pamphlets are available at the bookstore on tour days.

Be prepared for unpredictable weather. Rain may occur between November and March, and even summer brings chilly fog, particularly in the mornings. Stiff northwest winds can develop anytime, so dress in layers.

CEREMONIES AND SPECIAL TOURS

The Fresnel lens is lighted during the annual celebration held on the Saturday closest to November 15. Activities include



Living history demonstration



Annual lighting of the Fresnel lens

expanded tours, marine mammal displays, living history demonstrations and educational videos. The celebration concludes with the lighting of the lens from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

On guided tours, park docents recount the light station's rich history while leading visitors among the old buildings and around the grounds. Educational exhibits also reveal the story of the whales and their migrations. For group tours, offered year-round, reservations must be made three weeks in advance. Contact the park at (650) 879-2120 for current programs and group reservations.

For a virtual tour of the light station and more park information, select Pigeon Point Light Station SHP at www.parks.ca.gov.

PIGEON POINT HOSTEL

Four Light Station buildings, converted to lodging for up to 50 people, are operated by the American Youth Hostels. Each house has two male or female bunkrooms. Separate bunkrooms can be reserved for families or couples. Hostel guests share bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms, and participate in housekeeping activities. To make reservations, call (650) 879-0633 from 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Information is also available at www.norcalhostels.org.



Spiral staircase inside the lighthouse

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES &

Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park currently has no developed, wheelchair accessible facilities that meet the regulatory standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Año Nuevo State Reserve, 27 miles south of Half Moon Bay (650) 879-0227/2025
- Butano State Park, seven miles south of Pescadero (650) 879-2040
- Pescadero Marsh State Beach, 14½ miles south of Half Moon Bay (650) 879-2170

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information contact: San Mateo Coast Natural History Association • P.O. Box 3245 • Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 (650) 879-2025 (Año Nuevo SR)

Pigeon Point Light Station

State Historic Park



PLEASE REMEMBER

- Dogs and smoking are not permitted on the lighthouse grounds.
- Children taking the lighthouse tour must be at least 40 inches tall, and an adult must accompany those under age 9.
- No high heels on lighthouse tours—footwear must at least be secured with backstraps.
- Cliffs can collapse onto the rocks below—stay off the cliffs and on pathways.
- A public phone and restrooms are near the entrance to the park grounds.
- The U.S. Coast Guard owns Pigeon Point Light Station and leases it to California State Parks.



Legend

- Road
- Trail
- Fence
- Lighthouse
- Locked Gate
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Telephone
- Viewpoint